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ABSTRACT

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPISU) offered in Richmond (Virginia) a cooperative graduate program to prepare inservice administrators to act as change agents in Richmond-area schools. This paper considers the program's purposes, development, implementation, and future. Section I reviews the program's development, discussing (1) its rationale; (2) its design in 1979 by VPISU, Virginia Commonwealth University, and selected Richmond public schools; (3) its objectives and organization; (4) the system used to approve the program; (5) the committee that managed the program; and (6) program evaluation. Section II discusses the benefits and problems of the program, lists forces working for and against its success, and describes its schedule and the participants' progress. Finally, Section III speculates on the future of the program and proposes means to overcome anticipated problems. (MCG)

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PREPARING CHANGE AGENTS FOR METROPOLITAN AREAS

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I. Background

a. Scope. Traditionally, urban school systems have been more highly organized than the rest of the school systems in the United States. This condition has been a blessing and a hindrance at the same time. Along with the availability of highly skilled school employees, detailed curriculum material and adequate facilities, there was also the bureaucratic system which enabled the schools to operate rather efficiently. The educational bureaucracy, however, has in the past also served as a stabilizing factor more so than a factor that encourages individual change and innovation in the system. As a result, change of program in urban school systems is very difficult to bring about and one of the reasons is the lack of individuals trained to bring about change in a large bureaucracy.

The Richmond Metropolitan Area School Systems in Virginia reflects all of the good and bad conditions of the typical highly organized, bureaucratic, urban school system in the country. The problem the Metropolitan Richmond Public School System seemed to face, like so many other systems, was the lack of personnel trained to affect significant change and improvement in a highly organized educational system.

It was hypothesized that there are three levels in any public school system in which to work with individuals to affect changes and improvements in program. These levels are: (1) the individual classroom--working with the teacher to help affect changes in that environment, (2) the entire school

system--working with the chief administrative officer to bring about changes in an entire system, and (3) the individual school building--working with the principal or headmaster of the school. The program was designed to work with middle-management individuals--principals or headmasters of individual schools, and in some cases supervisors of subject matter. It was proposed that middle-management could bring about more effective change in large, urban school systems than could the chief administrative officer. The reasons given were that the change agent would be closer to the scene of action in a local school, the individual would be more intensely involved in the effort, whatever effort was organized would address an immediate identified need, there would be daily supervision by a management-type individual, there would be more opportunity to bring the teaching staff into a cooperative decision-making process, and the size of the change effort in terms of scope and number of personnel involved would be on a manageable scale.

This project sought to prepare a group of middle-management personnel to act as change agents within their own working arena which could be either in the public or private schools of Richmond. This project was an innovation for the University in that the project deviated significantly in both subject matter and logistical support from the traditional approach to providing school administrators with advanced professional preparation.

b. Objectives. In 1979, in cooperation with Virginia Commonwealth University and selected Richmond Metropolitan School

Systems, the College of Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI&SU) began to develop and implement a Cooperative Program in Metropolitan Leadership for potential and practicing administrators. The program was designed to help current and prospective administrators and supervisors (middle-management level positions) develop the imagination, skills and knowledge necessary for objective planning, implementation, and management.

The objectives of the Cooperative Program in Metropolitan Leadership centered around five concepts which comprise the essence of the program, namely:

(1) the utilization of urban community resources to support the preparation program,

(2) an instructional program especially designed to deal with problems and change in a metropolitan setting,

(3) research efforts designed to solve identified problems in urban school systems,

(4) a system of personal and professional counseling and development of a peer support network, and

(5) a project management system that was characterized by cooperative planning involving both instructors, managers, and participants.

Basically, this was a marriage of a change-agent preparation type of program and a personal incentive program represented by a University advanced degree program. While the University staff was training change agents to work in the metropolitan school

system the participants also completed the requirements for a terminal degree at the state university.

The general scheme of the program called for the delivery of course work by regular VPI&SU Faculty in the Richmond area which is approximately 200 miles from the main campus in Blacksburg. The first year of the project was devoted to course work dealing with such areas as: organizational development, administrative theory, social systems analysis, policy and governance, metropolitan problem identification, change strategies, and related subjects. While enrolled in these courses, the participants were employed full-time in the school systems. The second year was devoted to developing research and evaluation skills in the participants and the identification of significant urban educational problems that could be successfully attacked. The third year was devoted to the development of a solution to the identified problems through implementing some type of change or program in the individual school building.

Two groups of 25 middle-management participants were recruited and processed through the program. The first group, Cycle I, began the program in 1979 and for the most part have completed the third stage of the program. The original number of participants decreased through attrition to 18 participants who were able to finish the final stage. The second group of participants, Cycle II, recruited in 1980, have just finished the first and second phase of the program which is the course work and have entered, and in some instances finished, the final stage of the program during this academic year.

c. Decision-making Process. A group of approximately seven professors who teach in the specific area of Educational Administration in the College of Education at VPI&SU designed the program in conjunction with students; however, it was further refined in cooperation with similar faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Therefore, several levels of approvals had to be passed in both institutions in order to obtain the resources to implement the program. At VPI&SU, approval of the program had to be secured on the Division Director level, at the College Dean level, and on the University Council on Graduate Education level. In addition to the internal approvals, the University had to obtain permission from the Capital Consortium of Institutions of Higher Education in Richmond to deliver courses on the Richmond campus of Virginia Commonwealth University. Such approval systems are common in Virginia whenever courses are delivered away from the main campus of the University. Further, because the work of the participants in the program demanded extensive use of the library services and other resources on the VCU campus, approval had to be obtained from the Head Librarian and appropriate officials at that institution.

d. Program Management. The program was managed by a group composed of faculty members from both VPI&SU and VCU. This group made decisions regarding policy and overall strategy design. This group also acted as a Graduate Faculty Committee to maintain the levels of Graduate Study. The group passed on each candidate

to proceed to the next phase of work and counseled individuals in professional and personel problems that may effect the participant's professional work. The management group was augmented by representative students who sat in and helped make decisions relative to program content and logistics. This steering group still acts in a management function to the program.

Funds were allocated by VPI&SU to enable faculty members to travel to Richmond to either teach classes, advise and counsel participants, or to participate in the management group meetings. In as much as the course work was assigned as part of the individual professor's work load, additional funds for personal service were not required. The travel funds utilized in this project were state funds utilized for off-campus education extension work.

e. Project Evaluation. The design of the project stipulated that there would be a systematic evaluation of the program. Both Formative and Summative types of evaluation were specified. The Formative evaluation effort for the Cycle I group was to be completed at the time the participants completed the major share of the course work of the program. The purpose of the Formative evaluation was to provide for changes and corrections in the on-going program as needed and for input into planning for the proposed Cycle II program. This part of the evaluation program has been completed. Changes in the Cycle II part of the program resulted from this evaluative effort.

Summative evaluation for either Cycle has not been completed because not all of the participants have completed the program.

All evaluation to date has been internally completeed and there are no current plans to have any external evaluation. To date there have been no research efforts generated from this program. Some base-line data are being collected by the management group of the program, in hopes that there might be some research generated by the program design.

II. Change Analysis

a. Beneficial Forces. There are many benefits derived from working with a select group of educators in a unique preparation program. The group chosen to participate in the program was homogeneous in several significant aspects--each had similar job orientation, occupied a comparable level of position in the school system, lived in the same geographic area with common demographic statistics of urban area. The members of the group also possessed a similar motivation for upward mobility in the profession and a common education and experiential background. This enabled the Management Group and professors to orient the content of the course work to the type of audience that was involved and the problems they daily faced.

In working with any group of individuals in an innovative program there is a certain amount of "halo" effect in evidence. There was, in this group, a discernable amount of this effect as evidenced in certain behavior modes of students. This effect was short lived, however, mainly because of the amount of work that

was required of the participants and the time frame of events. Needless to say, the fact that a "halo" effect was in evidence assisted in getting the program started in a positive manner.

In addition, these participants were highly motivated which enabled the program to function efficiently and deal with the many problems and disappointments that a beginning program faces. As a result of the high motivation of the group, as well as some other factors, it was not difficult to establish an excellent peer support group environment among the participants. The peer support group proved very effective to the members during the life of the program and in several cases, sustained certain individuals over difficult personal and professional problems.

b. Hindering factors. Along with many benefits of working with these participants, there were certain hindering factors that had to be countered. There were logistical hinderances in trying to work with individuals over 200 miles from the home-base of the management group. Frequent travel to the site by the resident faculty was not deemed frequent enough to compensate for the distance factor. As a result, the VPI&SU faculty successfully sought the cooperation of the VCU faculty in participating in the program. This provided some home-base support faculty for the participants working in the Richmond area.

The most severe hinderance perceived by the management group was the lack of adequate local operational school funds for the participants when they sought to plan and implement an innovative

program in their own school organization. Not only does the middle manager lack discretionary funds for special projects, he/she is also limited in re-allocating resources that are currently available on the building level. A second possible hinderance was perceived as obtaining the support of the super-ordinate of the manager before program change can be affected. The Management Group of the Project decided that both possible hinderances could be addressed through the instructional program by appropriate course content and resource re-allocation simulations. Strategies were developed by the participants in conjunction with the University personnel to address these perceived hinderances of obtaining approval and adequate funding.

It was also anticipated that there would be some resistance to change on the part of the faculty members who were subordinate to the middle manager. During the course of the training sessions, respected educators who were successful in implementing innovations were brought into the group to talk about strategies they used to enlist the support of their teachers in similar circumstances. Through discussion groups, participants were able to see how a similar person was successful in getting teachers to support and be involved in a new project.

It was further hypothesized that change agents, to continue to be effective, must have a peer group support network in order to sustain their work. Lack of such a support system was perceived as a hinderance, therefore, each set of participants, Cycle I and II, was treated as a separate group and was exposed

to several group activities designed to build rapport between individuals and to build a cohesive group. In this manner, it was felt that the hinderance of working individually on an innovative project with no means of support would be negated.

FORCES WORKING FOR CHANGE	FORCES RESISTING CHANGE
Phase I & II (Training & Preparation)	
Peer group support	Full-time work load of participant
University faculty counseling support	Accelerated phase of training sessions
Support of participant's super-ordinate	Family commitment of participants
Individual participant incentive	
Phase III (Implementation)	
Peer group support	Sufficient resources to complete project
Support of participant's super-ordinate	Approval system of the school system
Individual participant's incentive	Teacher resistance to change
	Superintendent and School Board resistance to change

c. Time Frame. The time line of this project was designed to enable the participants to finish the training phase of the

program within two years and then begin to identify problems on which to work. This calendar then meant that participants were, in many instances, in training sessions sometimes as much as two evenings per week while still holding down a full-time job. This was a rather heavy schedule to maintain. As a result, four participants dropped out of the program. Adjustment to the training portion of the program was made by the Management Group to relieve the participants of this heavy work load. Although this occurrance did not have any noticeable effect upon achievement of the project's goals, it caused a lengthening of the total program which then deferred the participant's move into the project implementation stage in their individual school.

There were two groups of participants in this program; one group began in the Winter of 1979 and the other group in the Winter of 1980. The first group of participants, termed Cycle I, have completed all course work which makes up Phase I and II and for the most part have completed their projects for Phase III. The second group of participants, termed Cycle II, have just finished Phase I and II and have entered Phase III. Six of the participants in Cycle II have completed their projects at least for University purposes and have for all intents and purposes finished work in the program. The carry over of the project in the individual school will, however, continue for quite some time. Unfortunately, there are no resources at the University level to continue assistance to the individual participant on a consultative basis. Therefore, whatever support the individual

will receive will have to be from the peer support group and the superintendent of the individual middle manager.

III. Strategy Design

a. Future of the Program. In order to speak about the future of the program, it is necessary to separate out the three phases of the project. The first phase has been completed for both groups. In addition, the two groups finished the second phase of the training devoted to providing the participants with some identification, research and evaluation skills. The first group further finished the third phase and have moved out to independent refinement of their school project. It is anticipated that the program, as revised, will continue until the present group of active participants in both Cycle I and II have at least completed an individual project as far as they can, recognizing that constraints in each situation will temper the development/implementation time of the project. The University is committed in both staff and financial resources to complete the program as initiated which should insure completion of the project.

Further adjustment to the program, however, will be expected based upon Formative Evaluation efforts of the program management group. This cooperative program was designed to address change on two levels with more than one institution. The first level of change was in the University where the program was designed to change some of the procedures normally used to train leaders for the public school system. The second level of change was in the

public school system itself where the participants in the program actually implemented innovative programs to alleviate metropolitan education problems. Consequently, it is necessary first of all to determine whether the program was successful and then whether or not the individual middle manager will comtinue to be successful, and what carry-over will result. It will be more difficult to address the carry-over in the public schools because eventually each manager will have to individually implement a plan of action without the assistance of University personnel.

b. Strategies to Overcome Problems. The strongest aspect and at the same time the weakest link in the entire program, was and is actually the middle manager--the participant in the training sessions. The final success of the program depends upon the success the middle manager has in developing some changes in the organization to which he belongs.

The program was designed to enable a person to gain the skills, knowledge, and attitude necessary to affect changes within their organization. Part of the training was directed towards overcoming organizational constraints. How successful the candidate is at actually overcoming constraints then is oftentimes dependent upon both the efficacy of the manager and the actual constraints operating within the situation. Consequently, strategies to overcome hinderance to innovation has to deal with how the middle manager can be assisted in developing and implementing an innovation at the scene.

As a result, it is difficult to address anticipated problems in an individual situation in many different geographical sites. One problem that can be anticipated is the weakening of the support system for the individual manager. Both the peer group and the University support personnel were not as readily available during the change implementation stage as they were during the earlier periods of time. It has already been noted in those individuals that have identified problems, that the peer group support developed in the training stage of the program began to weaken. The focus of each participant changed from one of mutual concern for the progress of each member to a concern for the progress made by the individual participant in trying to identify a problem and develop an innovative program in their own organization. This was a natural shift, but as this shift progressed to the point where each individual was concerned with a program, a void in support was felt by the participant which in many cases was not filled. One strategy that might be developed to aid the peer support group may be to develop a reporting/critiquing activity by which each participant would first of all report on the progress of his work and secondly to have the work of the participant critiqued by his peers. This activity could be spearheaded by one University faculty member which would provide for a continuing contact by that group of personnel.

It has also become evident that the University personnel must be more active in the school building of the participant,

not in actually directing an innovation nor in serving in the traditional consultative role, but the University faculty member must serve as a member of an extended support group on site. The University person should also be a resource and sounding board for the participant who will actually carry on the innovation. If such an arrangement is to be implemented, there will need to be more travel resources.

Along with further involvement of University personnel, a strategy of involvement of the Chief Administrative officer of the school system must be developed. The purpose of this involvement would be to facilitate the approval system and also to seek support in trying to obtain additional resources for school innovative projects.